

**Silver Spring
Transportation Management District
Advisory Committee
December 10, 2009**

2a

Abbreviations Used Herein Include:

SSTC = Silver Spring Transit Center

IOS = Interim Operating Site

CNG = Compressed Natural Gas

CIP = Capital Improvements Program

Item 1, 2 – Introductions, Minute approval: Members introduced themselves. October and November minutes were approved with changes.

Item 3 – Chair’s Comments: In light of recent collisions involving pedestrians, **Samantha Mazo** stated the Committee should continue to include pedestrian safety issues as an FY11 budget priority during Silver Spring Transit Center (SSTC) construction.

Item 4 – Ride on update: Philip McLaughlin, Ride On Operations Manager, announced that the SSTC will be opening February, 2011. Bus operations are experiencing delays in the Interim Operating Site (IOS) during P.M. rush hours due to buses running into rush hour traffic and returning to Silver Spring Station late. To remedy the problem Ride On continues to make adjustments to schedules and running times in order to maximize vehicle resources.

The VanGo and other Champion manufactured buses have been pulled out of service indefinitely because of a significant safety failure and replaced with new buses that were slated to replace old regular service buses. Ride On is working with the Champion manufacturer to repair the buses. The City of Rockville buses were also affected, creating operational issues.

Mr. McLaughlin explained that the new Special Service (“S” Service Plan) bus schedule is one that runs in inclement weather on a limited trip schedule. It has only been activated once in the last five years, which was last March. The service was operationally successful; however, there were communications problems due to lack of community outreach and advertising. The 2010 S. Service Plan is published on the Ride On website and there are now brochures on buses. S Service is activated when there is four to six inches of snow. Notifications will be made by 4 am on news TV and radio.

In the past Ride On did not service bus routes that could not make the cycle times because they were adversely impacted by weather. However, the S plan will provide some continuing level of bus service with the first and last trips running as close to schedule as possible.

November’s ridership is off by twelve percent and five percent over the last year. The economy is seen as one of the reasons for the downturn. Ridership peaked when gas prices stabilized at \$4.00 a gallon last year, and some bus service has been cut in order to balance the County budget - both factors that contributed to reduced ridership this year compared to last.

Mr. McLaughlin said Ride On is not proposing additional bus service cuts to the FY10 & FY11 budgets, which is positive because other departments are cutting upwards of eight percent to balance the budget.

Ms. Mazo asked how many buses Ride On has in its fleet, and what are the most heavily used routes. **Mr. McLaughlin** said Ride On has 290 peak period buses and 375 total in its fleet. The Rt. 55 Germantown line is 16 miles and carries 9,000 passengers daily; the Rt. 15 line from Silver Spring to Langley Park is three miles but carries 4,500 passengers a day. Allocation for the Rt. 55 bus is 14 vehicles during peak hours and six for the Rt. 15 bus.

In response to comments from **Rukiyat Gilbert** about adding hybrid buses during Van Go peak running times, **Mr. McLaughlin** explained that the hybrid buses are allocated to other services in Silver Spring; not the Van Go. The clean burning diesels, specialty buses purchased for Van Go service, were replaced with older style buses. He also explained that compressed natural gas (CNG) buses are operated from the Gaithersburg Depot because they require a special fueling facility. Hybrid buses are operated from the Silver Spring Depot.

Mr. McLaughlin said that the S Service Plan signage will be posted at 400 bus kiosks. It is not possible to have signage at all 5,000 stops due to lack of space. Ride-On is improving bus stops under the County's Capital Improvements Program (CIP); so far 1,000 stops have been improved under the project. **Ms. Gilbert** suggested changing the message signs on buses to announce the S Service Plan.

Mr. Furgol asked if Ride-On broadcasts special announcements on cell phones, Blackberries or other devices like MARC does for its train riders. **Mr. McLaughlin** said not at the present time but there are plans to implement this type of system in the future.

Ride-On has a tracking system called *Signs of the Times*, variable message signs which will provide real-time bus information. These are currently available in five locations and are going to being deployed at other locations throughout the County in several years.

Mr. McLaughlin gave further details on the Van Go buses mechanical problems, stating that it is a braking issue. There is a legal disagreement between Ride-On and the bus manufacturer as to whether the braking defect is due to manufacturing. Grounding of the defective Van Go buses is indefinite.

Mr. Wexler asked about operational difficulties of the larger buses on the circulator routes. **Mr. McLaughlin** said that problems are not due to functionality, but customers who are accustomed to seeing the small purple Van Go bus may be confused. **Mr. Wexler** suggested using signs at bus stops to notify people of the new buses.

Mr. McLaughlin announced that Van Go average daily ridership was 840 passengers during the month of September, 2009, which is mid-range performance. In September 2008 a 3rd vehicle was added to circulation to help ensure 8-minute frequency.

Item 6 – Budget Priorities: **Mr. Wexler** asked what could the Committee list as a budget recommendation item to assist Ride On. **Mr. McLaughlin** said he understands the difficulty in asking the County Executive to fund more capacity during peak periods when ridership is

currently down. However, overall ridership has grown 32 percent over the last five years; at the same time, service (more frequency, more trips) has only grown 14 percent. A small number of buses could be reallocated from under-performing routes. However, issues arise with bus size replacement; when reallocating buses between routes the same style of bus should be used.

Ms. Gilbert said she was concerned that with the lack of notification of Van Go changes; ridership may drop further, making it increasingly difficult to justify service increases. **Mr. McLaughlin** agreed, adding that the 3rd Van Go bus will be cut after IOS construction, resulting in lagging 8-minute time cycles, especially during the P.M. peak period.

Mr. Tull asked if there is anything less expensive than the purple paint scheme used for Van Go identification, such as a banner attached to the door. **Mr. McLaughlin** said the problem is that the Van Go buses are pulled from a pool of 27 buses. The County does not want to spend additional money on the buses because they were slated to be discontinued due to age, however he would look into it. **Ms. McGrew** suggested contacting the County Attorney for guidance regarding public notification without jeopardizing getting the original buses back in service. **Mr. McLaughlin** said that Ride On has been working with the County Attorney regarding the cost associated with maintaining the old replacement buses.

Sgt. Harmon asked if there were any complaints or comments regarding Van Go service. **Mr. McLaughlin** said only 50-60 inquiries or comments per year, which is minimal. **Mr. Wexler** suggested asking the County Executive to resolve the manufacturer issue with Champion to get the buses back on the route as soon as possible, or at least to document this issue. **Mr. Tull** suggested using social media to notify the public of the issue. There were concerns that public notification may draw unwanted attention to the issue (brakes), so language should be carefully worded to emphasize that the Van Go is still running.

Ms. Brecher asked the committee if there were implications here for FY11 budget recommendations. **Mr. Tull** suggested that the 3rd Van Go bus be retained after IOS construction.

Mr. McLaughlin explained that the Rt. 18 Langley Park bus hours were expanded to 7 am-6:30 pm in order to accommodate Montgomery College students. **Mr. Furgol** asked about Rt. 127, which transports students between Rockville and the Takoma Park campus. **Mr. McLaughlin** said that in May 2008 the County Executive allocated funding to the Montgomery College shuttle; however, funding distribution was left to the College, which decided to discontinue service.

Ms. Gilbert suggested including signage notifying residents of the availability of Alert Montgomery.

Item 7 – Updates: **Ms. Brecher** informed the committee that funding from increased parking fees, implemented in FY09, forestalled the suspension of Silver Spring's Super FareShare program. She provided other updates on County activities.

Meeting adjourned. Next meeting date: January 14, 2010

Silver Spring Transportation Management District Advisory Committee (SSTMD AC)
Attendance Sheet
December 10, 2009

Voting Members (12)			
Name	Affiliation	Present	Absent
Chamber Members (3)			
Martin Atkinson	M&T Bank	X	
Tom Collins	Atlantech Online		X
Samantha Mazo / Co-chair	Linowes and Blocher LLP	X	
Citizens Advisory Board Members (3)			
Edward Furgol	Kemp Mill, Four Corners, East SS	X	
Charles Segerman	North & West Sector Plan Area		X
Andrew Wexler / Co-chair	CBD Resident	X	
Employers less than 50 employees (3)			
Rukiyat Gilbert	Southern Management Co.	X	
Everton Latty	iDeal Decisions, Inc.	X	
Cathy Wilde	Solid Waste Assoc. of N. America	X	
Employers with 50 or more employees (3)			
G. Michael Price	Discovery Communications	X	
Robin Goudy	Social & Scientific Systems	X	
Vacant			
Non-Voting Members (4)			
Sandra Brecher, DOT Transit Services	DOT Director or Designee	X	
Christine McGrew	M-NCPPC	X	
Sergeant Thomas Harmon	Montgomery County Police	X	
Staff			
Terrie O'Steen	DOT, Commuter Services		X
Nakengi Byrd	DOT, Commuter Services	X	
Jim Carlson	DOT, Commuter Services		X
Guests			
Philip McLaughlin	DOT, Transit Services	X	
Mel Tull	SS Regional Center	X	

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